

Press release: New research shows desperate dieters in danger – the secret world of online slimming pills

Online sellers of potentially dangerous slimming pills containing withdrawn pharmaceutical ingredients are putting desperate dieters' health at serious risk by seducing them with the promise of quick-fix weight loss and discreet deliveries that bypass discussions with their GP and pharmacist, new research reveals.

One in three slimmers have tried slimming pills purchased online, according to the joint #FakeMeds survey of 1,805 slimmers by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and Slimming World. Since April 2013, the Agency has seized nearly £4 million worth of dodgy weight loss pills.

Three quarters of slimmers (77%) were enticed by promises of rapid weight loss, more than half were attracted to being able to order discreetly (57%) and more than four in ten (44%) ordered online because they didn't want to speak to a GP or pharmacist, the survey revealed.

However, almost two-in-three (63%) suffered unpleasant side effects after taking slimming pills bought online. These side effects included diarrhoea, bleeding that wouldn't stop, blurred vision and heart problems. Worryingly, four out of five (81%) didn't report these side effects to anyone.

The potentially dangerous products seized by the Agency are not tested for safety and have been found stored in dirty, rat-infested warehouses and garden sheds. In 2016, MHRA seized more than 4.6 million fake medical products and closed more than 5,000 websites selling medicines illegally.

Four out of 10 respondents said they had used the slimming pills knowing there were health risks, with more than six out of ten (62%) doing so because they were 'desperate to lose weight'.

Sarah-Jayne Walker, who became obsessed with slimming pills bought online before quitting her habit and eventually joining Slimming World, said: "I used to spend hours searching the web for what I thought were the right diet pills, ones that said they would work straight away and that had the best reviews. My mind became consumed with those pills...

"However, after suffering heart palpitations, IBS, sickness, light headedness and even fainting, I knew I had to get a grip and sort my mind out. I joined Slimming World at the end of May and it has been a revelation. I don't have to punish myself or feel guilty for eating anymore and I've lost just over two stone. The support has been amazing and I can't tell you how proud I feel of myself."

The majority of diet products are regulated as foods, however the MHRA

regularly seizes products that contain withdrawn pharmaceutical ingredients due to risks of heart attacks and strokes.

MHRA Senior Policy Manager, Lynda Scammell, said:

Quick fixes for losing weight may have serious health consequences in the short or long term, including organ failure and death.

It's essential you know what you're buying online and what the risks are. If you don't, your weight could end up being the least of your worries!

If you're looking to buy medicines online, check if the seller is registered by using our easy online checking system, www.gov.uk/fakemeds or check if they display the Distance Selling logo.

If you think you've bought fake medical products, please let us know via www.gov.uk/fakemeds. This way we can use the information to continue to seize these products and close websites that are putting public health at risk.

There are reputable groups out there that can support you to lose weight through healthy lifestyle changes. Your GP or healthcare professional will be able to advise you on finding the right option for you.

Jenny Caven, Slimming World's Head of External Affairs, said: "It's easy to see how quick fix promises made by the sellers of online slimming pills could seem tempting to people who are desperately struggling with their weight.

Buying slimming pills online can be incredibly risky though. The sellers are often unregulated and taking the pills puts people at risk of dangerous side effects. Learning to make changes to the way you shop, cook and eat and getting support to develop new healthy habits really is the best way to lose weight. Not only is it safer, it's also far more satisfying and has the added benefit that newfound habits can be passed on to the people around you too. Getting support makes your new habits more likely to stick in the longer term and you won't suffer any nasty side effects.

The #FakeMeds survey highlights how easy it is for people to buy potentially dangerous slimming pills online. Therefore, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is working in partnership with Slimming World as part of the Agency's #FakeMeds

Campaign to encourage those wanting to lose weight to turn to safe, legitimate and appropriate routes.

The #FakeMeds campaign website has a range of easy and quick top tips to keep yourself safe online. www.gov.uk/fakemeds

If you would like to hear more about the healthy weight loss support that Sarah-Jayne experienced please visit www.slimmingworld.co.uk